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**(U) The SIGINT Philosopher: Unlike All My Terrible Teammates, I Am a Wonderful Teammate**

FROM: (U//FOUO) [REDACTED]

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(U//FOUO) Like many of you, I recently finished providing my supervisor with written bullets summarizing my achievements to help her with the task of completing my yearly [ACE](#) assessment. As I sought for just the right phraseology that would demonstrate how irreplaceable I am, I found myself using phrases like "produced 50% of all reporting on a team of seven people," or "was the only team member who did such-and-such." They were all some version of indirectly saying "I am more productive than other people."

(U) Then, I had to complete bullets for the collaboration section, in which I tried desperately to show that while outperforming everyone else, I also somehow managed to help them out in such a way that they were more productive because of me. Which means I then had to talk about the great work done by those same people I supposedly outperformed blindfolded with my hands tied behind my

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outperformed blindfolded with my hands tied behind my back. This highlights what I think is an inherent weakness in our promotion system (and most promotion systems): *the people we're supposed to be cooperating with to get the job done are the same ones we're competing with for limited promotion and awards dollars.*

(U) My guess is that if you are thinking about getting promoted, it probably complicates your calculus somewhat when you are making decisions about how to spend your time in a day. If you are a subject-matter expert, and something really juicy and interesting but also difficult comes in, do you knock it out yourself, or do you spend extra time to have someone newer handle the work with guidance from you?

(U) Judging from many offices I've been in, I would say that at least sometimes, the prevailing prejudice is that *it's better to be able to take credit for doing something important without help than it is to claim you enabled others to do the same work.* If you think about it, it's also a much easier bullet to write. "Wrote 40% of reports on a team of eleven people" is easier to understand and sounds more impressive than "helped give a lot of people who were feeling underutilized a purpose in life by giving them stuff to do that mattered," or "helped someone to do a good job on it even though it took more time to do that than it would have taken to do it myself."

(U//FOUO) I work on a very small team, and so for most work, I don't have much choice but to do it myself. But I have felt this same tug in my own work, and confess I sometimes feel impatient while explaining things to others, because deep down, I sense it is hurting my ability to afford to send my son to MIT one day.\*

(U) Almost everyone has mentoring as part of their objectives, but it is much easier to document "formal" mentoring, such as a role in a professional organization, than it is to document informal day-to-day helping out of the people around you. LeBron James (the basketball player) will never get the respect Michael Jordan did, because nobody cares that you found the open guy for the winning shot with five seconds left instead of taking the shot yourself. In fact, your office "Lebron" has it even worse than the real one does: there are no statistics to record *ad hoc* office assists.

(U) But assists should matter. When I worked at a large corporation once, they had a system to try to rewa d

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corporation once, they had a system to try to reward employees for helping each other. Essentially, everyone got a certain number of points they earned each month that could be applied to purchases from a rewards program. It was a really good rewards program, and people really used those reward points. In addition to the ones you got for yourself, you got some points you could give to someone for helping you out at work. It was a major incentive to help other people. Some employees who were especially helpful covered their entire Christmas shopping using those reward points.

(U) *The notion of "peer performance review" has apparently taken off in some circles.* According to a 31 July 2012 article in the Wall Street Journal (see it [here](#)), some firms are using peer performance reviews as a way to flatten management and encourage teamwork. Bloggers commenting on this article pronounced that "The manager-driven, once-a-year performance review may soon become a thing of the past. Good riddance."

(U) Admittedly, there are some problems with peer performance review. One big issue is the same one that plagues internet news sites that allow comments: junk feedback. While it is probably dangerous to completely base rewards on employee feedback, I have to believe that what peers think about an employee has to mean something. If a branch manager thinks that an employee deserves 10% of his branch's available rewards, but the branch rank and file feel this person deserves none, that shows at the very least that there is a problem somewhere.

(U) I don't think I've spent a day in my career as a post-9/11 hire where I haven't heard about the importance of collaboration. If it really is that important, it seems like it ought to be have some metrics other than those dreamt up in my own self-conflicting -- and self-conflicted -- bullets.

(U) Notes:

\* (U) My son will never go to MIT. In order to multiply by sevens, he has to physically walk across the room to imagine himself scoring a touchdown for each factor of seven.

(U//FOUO) Have thoughts on this topic? Post them on the [related Tapioca Pebble](#).

(U) *Standard disclaimer: The opinions expressed by the SIGINT Philosopher are his own and do not necessarily*

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